DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 268 804 FL 015 624

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TITLE Implementation Procedures in Bilingual Education: The Difference between Success and Failure.
PUB DATE 86
NOTE 19p.; Paper presented at the Conference of the National Association for Bilingual Education (Chicago, IL, April 1-5, 1986).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Attitudes; *Bilingual Education Programs; Bilingualism; Curriculum Development; Educational Policy; English (Second Language); *Language of Instruction; *Program Implementation; *School Policy; State Standards; *Teacher Qualifications; Time Factors (Learning)

ABSTRACT

Rather than abandon bilingual education programs that have not met expectations, there is a need to assess implementation procedures in bilingual programs to determine whether or not they foster success or failure. Areas to be examined for insights and improvement include: (1) present policies concerning the goal of bilingual education and current expectations, (2) research data available on first language acquisition and learning and its application to instructional procedures, (3) curricular decisions that often ignore basic research findings and yet claim they are doing so in the name of bilingual education, and (4) implementation procedures that do more harm than good, such as federal and state guidelines, school administration policies, and teacher qualification standards. (MSE)

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# IMPLEMENTATION PROCEDURES IN BILINGUAL EDUCATION: THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SUCCESS AND FAILURE

by Albar A. Peña

## The Present Situation:

After nearly two decades of implementing bilingual programs in the United States, it appears that no matter what the latest research indicates about the positive effects of and pedagogical reasons for bilingual education (Cummins 1980, Krashen 1981, Wong Fillmore 1982, Tikunoff 1983, and Hakuta 1986), the power brokers in the education community remain unconvinced or uncaring that it is a worthwhile and educationally sound concept. Worst still, bilingual education proponents constantly find themselves on the defensive, having to react to what often is described as biased, distorted, prejudicial and misrepresented data. Witness the vehement tirade on bilingual education recently presented in a speech to the Association for a Better New York by Secretary of Education, William J. Bennett. He unabashedly branded "a failure" two decades of federal policies to help educate language minority students (NABE News, Lyons 1985). At best, one can only hope that the gentleman has been horribly (and not maliciously) misinformed and is mixed-up about the facts and is not seriously trying to discredit countless of successful practices and programs in bilingual education that have, indeed, made the difference between success and failure for limited English proficient (LEP) children in school.

If, on the other hand his statements are taken seriously, one can only surmise that the educational problems of the majority of our linguistically

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and culturally distinct children will remain wholly unanswered and unresolved. In the name of "flexibility"* which appears to be what Mr. Bennett is suggesting while demigrating any bilingual attempt, he is, indeed, exhorting school districts to return to monolingual, monocultural education (or some form of it) as the only viable educational alternative for what he says has dismally failed. If that is the case, let us not forget what has been an undeniable fact proven statistically time and time again in the history of public education, i.e., that monolingual (English only) education has the worst tract record for linguistic minority children. School districts given the choice of "flexibility" will only provide an "easy way out" for administrators and educators who are unwilling to go the extra mile to meet the educational need of our language-minority students. The end result, in this case, is predictable - millions of these children will suffer from educational neglect and insensitivity and will be doomed to failure and a fate of second class citizenship - forever destined to the welfare rolls. We are hopeful that this is not the final direction for a program that has so much promise to provide equal educational opportunities for a majority of our school children.

*flexibility in Mr. Bennett's address is taken to mean that school districts do not have to make use of the native language of the child but rather or free to use any other approach but bilingual education.

Assessing the Situation

However, there is a bigger and more important task at hand. That is, we need an attempt to come to a fair, unemotional, unbiased and pedagogical answer to arrive at a workable solution. To say that everything that has ever been implemented in the "name of bilingual education" has been "successful" would be naive and dishonest. On the other hand, we also know that a lot of the so-called bilingual programs have deliberately been programmed for failure. Therefore, this paper intends to investigate the following areas of concern which deal primarily with implementation procedures which the author believes to be at the crux of the problem and normally determine the difference between success and failure. The implementation procedures deal with the following areas which will be explored:

1.) Present policies concerning the goal of bilingual education and present expectations;

2.) Research data available on first and second language acquisition and learning and its application to instructional procedures;

3.) Curricular decisions which often ignore these basic findings and yet claim they are doing it in the name of bilingual education; and

4.) Implementation procedures which very often do more harm than good.

In this endeavor, let us remember that our educational system in the last 200 years has undergone many changes, always striving to arrive at a more satisfactory answer to our educational problems. Let us not forget to accord the same latitude to bilingual education in our quest for excellence and equal opportunity for one and all.

1. Policies Concerning Bilingual Education

First, let us examine very closely U.S. policy concerning bilingual education. In 1968, when Congress enacted the landmark legislation known as Title VII, The Bilingual Education Act, (U.S. Office of Education 1971) the education community heralded it as one of the most innovative educational approaches of the twentieth century. Through this legislation Congress affirmed the special educational needs of our linguistic minority who had long suffered because of the ethnocentric, monolingual orientation of our educational system. To take care of this tremendous oversight, federal funds became available to develop and carry out new and imaginative programs of bilingual education. Through this "new" approach, it was the intent of Congress to finally provide equal educational opportunities to all our children.

While many successes can be credited to such an approach since the beginning of the program, we are still troubled by a nagging, philosophical problem - and that is, what is the real goal of bilingual education in this country?

If one examines the term bilingual education, one would assume that eventually the end product would be bilingually proficient individuals. Unfortunately, in the minds of many administrators and educators, what bilingual education is interpreted to mean is the utilization of the student's native language as a medium of instruction only until such time that the student acquires "English proficiency" so that he may then continue to receive his

full instruction solely in English. Thus, the ultimate goal of the program is English monolinguality - as soon as possible and at all costs.

Herein lies the controversy! Since it has been assumed that the main reason that LEP students do not succeed academically is due to their inability to speak English, most people will go along with that interpretation. However, if we explore the situation further, we'll soon discover that the controversy is either based on a political or an emotional basis and it cuts across federal, state and local levels. Politically the argument centers on whether tax-levy funds at the federal level be used to maintain and promote languages other than English (Epstein 1977) and the ex-Senator Hayakawa inspired group U.S. English lobbying behind the proposed amendment to make English as the "official" language of this country (The Wall Street Journal 1985); emotionally, the argument centers on the strong belief by ultra-conservative elements that cultivation of another language and culture other than English will slow down the total assimilation process (full Americanization) and will result in separatist movements (America, love it or leave it syndrome). As a result, what normally happens, is that only the bare minimum requirements of any bilingual statute is what ends up being implemented. This usually turns out to be transitional bilingual education, e.g., programs in which some form of "English proficiency" (more on this subject later) is gained, then study in and of the native language is discontinued. At this point bilingual education becomes obsolete. As the distinguished scholar Joshua Fishman stated in his address to the participants of the National Association for Bilingual Conference in 1976, "as long as bilingual education is viewed as a compensatory

type program (using the native language only to compensate for their limited English proficiency) it will only be a "pill" that educators feed our "poor disadvantaged" children to cure them of their bilingual disease" (Fishman, NABE Conference, 1976).

If that is to be our policy, what a tremendous waste of a natural asset (other languages besides English) that the rest of the world conserves and cherishes. Additionally, by not capitalizing fully on the benefits of bilingual education, we are still short-changing the majority of those students whose educational needs are still not being met when a monolingual approach is used.

2. Research data Concerning First and Second Language and its Application to Instructional Procedures

In dealing with this area of concern, the latest research data on the subject (Cummins 1980, McLaughlin 1981, Hakuta 1986) indicate that first language acquisition occurs from birth to around ages six and eight during which time a system of communication is developed in a natural way. The environment in which this happens is usually one that is pressure free and conducive for this phenomenon to occur. It is during this time the average, normal child focuses on the message (simply trying to communicate) rather than the form (correctness of grammar, word order, etc.) Cummins refers to this competence as basic inter-personal communication skills (BICS) which is needed for social communication, i.e., talking in general to friends and peers, which is not cognitively demanding and usually occurs before the child enters school (Cummins 1981).

On the other hand, the kind of language skills which are needed for academic success are referred to as cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) which are very cognitive demanding (learning abstract concepts which content related, etc.) and are learned in the school environment. The above information is valuable in order to allow the teacher to make appropriate instructional decisions based on the individual needs of her/his children.

Most importantly, the above information has a direct bearing on second language learning and it can make the difference between success and failure in any classroom (be it a monolingual but primarily a bilingual classroom). The research bears out that it would take approximately two years to replicate the BICS skills to the equivalency to that of a native speaker; on the other hand, CALP skills may take up to 5 to 7 years of learning the second language to achieve native-like competence and compete academically (Cummins 1980). Pedagogically then, one would have to assume that our limited English proficient (LEP) students should not be prematurely exited out of bilingual programs until such competence has been achieved.

3. Curricular Decisions Which Often Ignore Research Findings

That the above is often ignored is obvious when school districts opt to offer transitional bilingual programs (three year programs at best) as the maximum time children should stay in the program. By doing this, they are definitely violating the above stated premises. In the haste to make the LEP student English proficient (a definition which at best means that the child has at least achieved the BICS level but not unanimously agreed upon by all

educators), teachers exit the majority of the students prematurely and only with an obvious weak foundation in the second language which by the time he reaches the grade levels where cognitive demanding skills are required he will fail dismally.

Additionally research also reveals that bilingualism is least likely to occur when the learning of the second language is done with a subtractive goal in mind, i.e., in order to learn the second language, it must be done totally at the expense of the first one (Cummins 1981). Needless to say, the results of such an approach (also known as the "sink or swim approach") are obvious. Faced with this situation the LEP children are placed in double jeopardy - continued and necessary development in the first language is abruptly stopped and cannot be used for learning and secondly they cannot cope with the second one while having to compete academically with their English-speaking peers. More often than not, the LEP child usually sinks instead of swimming. The alternative to reverse such a negative approach should be the following: The LEP child must be given the opportunity to acquire the second language (English) in an additive manner, i.e., be able to learn content through and further develop his first language while learning the second; the end result being the plus factor of having two well-developed languages instead of semi-literacy skills in both.

In view of the above mentioned statements, their implication to bilingual education is of foremost importance - especially when one considers the controversy which still pervades this educational concept, i.e., is it really

necessary and if it is, what should be the goal of present programs.

The interpretation of such data should be obvious. If this pedagogical assumption is to be valid, ample time must be allowed for the first language to be established with a strong and firm foundation before shifting to the second one. In this manner, the learning of content and well-developed literacy skills in the first language would allow the LEP child to learn the second gradually well, and in a cognitively undemanding manner. The end result would be children able to keep up academically and who will eventually be able to transfer these academic skills to his newly learned language with the least amount of problems.

Let us not sacrifice this valuable time necessary for cognitive development to occur in the first language for the flimsy goal of obtaining a "fast proficiency in English" without a sound cognitive base.

4. Implementation Procedures

Based on my experience as national director of Title VII in the U.S. Office of Education and years of experience in the area of teacher education and preparation of bilingual teachers, the following observations are deemed relevant concerning the implementation procedures of programs at the federal, state and local level. They are, in my opinion, critical factors which very often determine the success or failure of any bilingual program.

A. Federal and State Guidelines. While many of the school districts receiving federal assistance for bilingual education do follow Federal guide-

lines, very often they do it on a minimal basis, i.e., they follow only the bare requirements to qualify for Federal assistance. Then, unfortunately, there are those that only simply pay lip service to these requirements and hope that an audit is never forthcoming; however, I would like to believe that these are in the minority. The fact remains that there are school districts who welcome federal funds only because of sagging local budgets and not because of a true commitment to bilingual education. In some cases the complaint is that federal guidelines have become dictatorial and infringe on local autonomy. What they really want instead is "money on the stump", i.e., give us the funds and we will determine how to spend them without any questions asked. In the meantime the "push-pull" factor continues - school districts welcome Federal intervention only on their terms while forgetting that the reason for the necessary federal intervention came about because of the apathy on the part of states and school district to own up to their responsibility to meet the educational needs of language minority children.

Nevertheless, major changes have occurred since the advent of Title VII - many states now have state-mandated laws that provide for bilingual education. However, because of the continuing controversy that surrounds bilingual education and, even now, the Federal government's negative comments on the subject, one wonders whether or not there would be a true commitment on the part of the States to continue with the program in the name of flexibility or should Federal funds cease to exist. I would hope that objective and pertinent data, such as the one that has been cited in this paper, will be seriously considered and be used as the basis for States and school districts to

continue their bona fide efforts on the subject and have the courage to implement these programs in a manner which is most beneficial to all children. Proponents of bilingual education still maintain that there is nothing wrong with the soundness of the bilingual concept -- if it's properly implemented, it has certainly been proven to work.

B. School Administration's Support. Very high on the list of what is needed to give a bilingual program a fighting chance to succeed is a strong and committed support of the administration. If the administrative hierarchy is truly knowledgeable about what constitutes successful bilingual instructional features and allows for them to be incorporated into on-going bilingual programs, half the battle would be won. In this area, Tikunoff's latest findings of his three-year longitudinal study on the subject would be most enlightening (Tikunoff 1983, 19.) Instead, school districts try to implement bilingual programs guided by a traditional orientation which often relegates the program to a compensatory role because it was considered simply as an "add-on" (the regular monolingual English curriculum is compressed to allow possibly 30 to 40 minutes of instruction about the native language) or as a "special program" outside the "so-called" regular program (usually a pull-out period for ESL instruction only). Adding insult to injury, traditional school district policies, which were designed for English only programs, are still in effect. When this occurs it makes the bilingual program totally incompatible with the rest of the curriculum and it will obviously be doomed for failure.

Additionally the administration must also see to it that the "key must

curriculum leader", the principal, is also a team player; one who is also knowledgeable and committed to the success of bilingual education. If this is not the case and his support is lacking, faculty members find themselves floundering and ambivalent in a contradictory situation - what they were trained and hired to do versus what the principal will or will not allow them to do because he does not support the concept of bilingual education.

The worst offense in this area is for the school administration to allow the bilingual program to be implemented in name only - either to appease the community or to soothe its conscience. The former is deceptive and dishonest since no real serious attempt is done to make the program successful and the latter, at best, is highly suspect about its real intention. In any event, it is these dubious implementation procedures that lead to many of the failures that have occurred and that continuously adds fuel to the misconceptions that still exist concerning the subject. Worse still, it gives the unwarranted ammunition that critics of the program constantly use to undermine it.

C. Teacher's Qualifications. As is always the case, a major factor in determining and maintaining the integrity and quality of the instructional program is the best trained and qualified teaching staff. The old truism still applies - "no matter how well conceived and designed a program may be, it will not work unless we have the properly trained personnel." In this endeavor, many states have made provisions to insure that certification or credentials for bilingual teachers at least contain the minimum competencies necessary to teach in the program. These vary according to each individual

state. However, in spite of these genuine efforts to continuously improve teacher bilingual compentencies, there are two concerns that merit further scrutiny. One deals with "native language proficiency" and the other with the reluctance on the part of schools to allow their teachers to utilize it, for instructional purposes and when they do, it is only allowed on a minimal basis.

In dealing with the first concern, one can safely state that quite a few of our teachers possess the ability to speak the native language at least at the oral level. However, judging from experience, a good number of these teachers find themselves at a disadvantage of not possessing the literacy and writing skills necessary to handle the technical terminology which is content related. These skills can easily be acquired through formal training in those areas. However, a big danger exists that may prevent teachers from obtaining this higher refinement of their language skills. It is over-confidence and a false sense of security. Since these teachers possess this oral proficiency they very often assume that is all that is necessary and that no further refinement is necessary. However, eventually they will realize that specific terminology in the different content areas is vital to the success of the program.

The second concern involving the refusal or reluctance to allow teachers to utilize the native language is still a more serious problem. Countless number of teachers continue to complain that many principals explicitly make it a point to discourage the use of the native language - particularly

instruction through it. Complaints usually heard are as follows: "Even though I was hired as a bilingual teacher, I have been told to teach only in English", or "I'm restricted to use the native language only for translational purposes" or "Don't use their native language - it will only give them a crutch - what they really need is a strong dose of English", etc.

In any event teachers and administrators must realize that these two concerns, if not corrected, will have serious adverse effects on the success of the program.

Conclusion

Having at least attempted an objective analysis of the program, some important points dealing with the difference between success and failure have been addressed and I am sure that some have not. As we continue in our search for equity in education, we must continue to amass the most objective and pertinent data base that affects our instructional decisions. When it is available and yet we choose to ignore it then one usually has the tendency to take the expedient approach. The powers that he decide that if there isn't a 100% success in the program then the program isn't worthwhile or that it has failed. Rather than instituting the necessary changes to make it succeed, they would throw the "baby out with the wash". We need to be reminded that in our educational history we have continuously strived to obtain better answers, better approaches and ideas to improve the educational opportunities of the student population for whom we are responsible. Our instructional decisions should always be based on informed, unemotional, unbiased and objective data. In so doing we commit ourselves to provide the best

instructional programs which will pave the way for a more compatible society.

Let us, then, resolve and commit ourselves to the best education possible for our children - let it be our legacy to our children who are the future of tommorow.

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